

*Responses from Damar Charter Academy to Observations in the 2nd year Site Visit Report
July 18, 2013*

Indicator 4.1 Substandard d (pages 7/8):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

The sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas does not focus on core (prioritized) learning objectives.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

In order for DCA to move forward with aligning curriculum, behavior management systems, and assessments in a cohesive way, the following plan of action will be implemented:

- **Clearly define** classroom program areas of focus and student progression from one program to the next:
 1. Intensive Interventions Program (1 classroom)
 2. High School General Education Program (1 classroom)
 3. Elementary General Education Program (2 classrooms, divided by grade)
 4. Intermediate General Education Program (1 classroom)
 5. Life Skills Education Program (2 classrooms, divided by grade)
 6. High School Vocational Education Program (4 classrooms, divided by grade)
- **Increase** the focus on post-secondary preparation (high school diploma or vocational skill set) for ALL students by
 1. Increasing off-line credit offerings to High School General Education students (Diploma Track)
 2. Shifting focus to functional academic and vocational standards for High School Vocational Education Program students (Certificate of Completion Track)
- **Create** annual IEP goals that ultimately support a student's growth toward post-secondary preparation and modify (at least) annually based on assessment data collected
- **Retrain** all DCA faculty and staff on the Damar Charter Academy Behavior Management Guide (page 33-34 of the DCA Parent & Student Handbook) and positive behavior support strategies (including our school-wide "clip chart" system), which we already have in place. (A copy of the current Damar Charter Academy Behavior Management Guide is also attached.)

Indicator 4.2 (page 9/10):

Observations from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

The concerns expressed were the lack of highly-qualified teaching staff during parts of the school day, and the lack of educational training for those paraprofessionals who spend the bulk of the day with the students in the pods.

Recommendation: Educational training for the paraprofessionals at the “pod” settings on the Damar Campus should be provided.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

The additional classrooms located at the former DCA site were developed in conjunction with a move to the more community-based school setting to provide transition assistance to some of the most challenged DCA students – essentially increasing the number of classrooms from 10 to 13. Prior to the move the team met and identified potential students who may have difficulty moving to the off campus location and posed a danger to themselves or others based on rates/intensity of maladaptive behaviors.

Approximately 12 students were identified, all of whom reside at Damar Services and participate in the residential treatment program. These classrooms would serve the “at risk” students and work towards decreasing maladaptive behaviors so that a smooth, positive transition could be made to the new school location.

The team identified teachers that would teach the additional classrooms. One would serve the students in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Subsequent additional teachers were identified to assist as necessary due to the unique nature of the students served. Support staff from Damar Services are present to assist with daily behavioral management and facilitation of educational objectives.

After the completion of the spring semester teachers and administrators met and identified several challenges that arose surrounding the additional classrooms at the former DCA site. The challenges were as follows:

1. Consistent staffing support to assist in de-escalating maladaptive behaviors
2. Too many students in and out of the classrooms on a daily basis, transitioning from one location to the next, due to at risk behavior or a decrease in behavior
3. Inability for teachers to prepare thorough lessons due to changing population and because the teachers were “spread too thin” running between two different classroom locations
4. Lack of consistent protocol for students to transition from the new school building to the former school site and vice-versa.

The teachers and administrators formed a committee to discuss how to best address the challenges that arose. The committee agreed that there is a value in having a classroom which remains at the previous location. There are students who benefit from that environment and need further time/development in order to transition successfully. The committee determined that it is valuable and important to provide the students that are not always successful behaviorally with access to a more comprehensive educational experience, rather than resorting to utilizing more typical interventions such as suspension, expulsion, homebound instruction, etc.

The following recommendations were made:

1. Assign one teacher full time to one classroom setting – limited to no more than 10 students at any one time.
2. Develop a protocol for moving students from the additional classroom at the former site to the DCA building – including time frames and with IEP inclusion and compliance (thresholds, minimum and maximum time frames, behavioral thresholds, student progress).
3. Consistent staff will support this classroom each day, just as in all DCA classrooms.
 - a. More specific training covering classroom expectations of staff and specific needs of the student population within this setting will occur for the instructional assistant staff assigned to this classroom.
4. Any use of the additional classroom setting outside of the primary DCA building must be included in the student's IEP as endorsed by the Case Conference Committee.

Indicator 4.2 Substandard b (page 9):

Observations from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

As delivered, instruction is not focused on core learning objectives.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

In order for DCA to provide clarity and consistency in behavior modification pedagogies across the school, the following plan of action will be implemented:

- (as mentioned above) **Retrain** all DCA faculty and staff on the Damar Charter Academy Behavior Management Guide (page 33-34 of the DCA Parent & Student Handbook) and positive behavior support strategies (including our school-wide “clip chart” system)
- **Provide** feedback regarding behavior modification practices during faculty and staff evaluations
- **Increase** scope and frequency of staff training pertaining to behavior modification practices.
- **Ensure** classroom policies/rules are clearly displayed and communicated to students and staff and are based on positive behavior support strategies.
- **Analyze** each student's behavioral data quarterly to report progress on current IEP goals and adjust behavioral intervention plans as needed.

Indicator 4.4 Substandard e (pages 11/12):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

Assessment results are not used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

In order to effectively use data at the school-wide level, DCA will implement the following action plan:

- Continue conducting survey-level assessments of students' initial academic performance levels in Reading Comprehension (R-CBM), Math Concepts and Applications (MCAP), and Math Computation (MCOMP) via Aimsweb.
- Continue using Aimsweb survey-level assessment data to formulate individual student goals that would achieve our **school-wide target** of raising a student's academic performance level at the fall period (or upon enrollment) from between the 10th and 25th percentile (based on national norms) to a percentile demonstrating satisfactory student growth (currently targeting between the 25th and 50th percentile based on national norms) by the spring period.
- **Increase** the frequency of data collection in order to make better informed instructional decisions by administering Aimsweb probes weekly (vs. monthly).
- Continue assessing performance levels of students served in our Life Skills programs via Teachtown.
- Continue daily behavioral data collection.
- **Begin** assessing vocational program students via the PAES program and ABAS-II.
- **Analyze** each student's behavioral, vocational, and Aimsweb/Teachtown data quarterly to report progress on current IEP goals and adjust teaching strategies as needed.
- Use behavioral, vocational, and Aimsweb/Teachtown data to create/revise annual IEP goals.

Indicator 4.5 (page 13/14):

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

We are in the process of developing improved staff training and classroom resource management and supports in conjunction with the supports provided by Damar's residential programs...this includes:

- Consistent assignment of instructional assistants within classrooms.

- Instructional assistant managers working alongside instructional assistants in classrooms daily.
- Development of a revised staff training module that is focused on special education learning principles and modifications, and best practice educational supports for special education – based on handicaps, etc.
- Higher accountability for staff policies related to cell phone use, lack of engagement with students, etc...
- Teachers and Teacher Assistants involved in instructional assistant evaluations – regularly.
- Performance Quality Improvement data to support new training and established outcomes for instructional assistants behavior and competencies. In addition, the Principal or designee will evaluate the effectiveness of staff supports in the classrooms weekly via teacher input during professional development/weekly meeting times, and be very active in correcting inefficiencies at high levels.
- The consistent instructional assistants and managers will be trained on classroom expectations via teachers and DCA administration and will also be provided with written copies of what these expectations entail.

Indicator 4.5—The section regarding sharing of student info (page 14):

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

- **Formalize** student classroom/program transitions via a change of placement conference.
- **Re-educate** faculty and staff on the FERPA guidelines included in our new student information packet and in the Student Records section of our Parent & Student Handbook (page 20). Emphasize only sharing information in a FERPA-compliant manner, and only with those “who have a legitimate educational interest in the information.” (A copy of our annual notification of FERPA rights is also attached.)
 - Disclosure is also made to educational stakeholders (i.e. parents, guardians, DCS, etc) regarding the contract/agreement between DCA and Damar Services in the sharing of confidential student information.

Indicator 4.5 (page 14/15):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

Professional development opportunities at Damar Charter Academy are not clearly aligned to demonstrated need for instructional improvement, nor through the analysis of student attainment and improvement (substandard d & e).

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

A professional development initiative for the upcoming 2013-14 school year is currently in development:

- This will include designated weekly meetings among teaching and administrative staff. Activities, ideas, and group brainstorming ideas will occur in small, work-group settings.
- A couple books will be purchased for all teachers to read during the year and draw teaching ideas from. Some of the options being looked at are: *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (Paul Tough), *Be Different: My Adventures with Asperger's and My Advice for Fellow Aspergians, Misfits, Families, and Teachers* (John Elder Robison), *Push* (Sapphire), or either *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* or *Working with Students: Discipline Strategies for the Classroom* (Ruby Payne). These can be read and applications and ideas from these can be discussed in detail in the small group settings.
- DCA will request additional references from Dr. Angelov regarding equity issues for staff members and to assist with trainings.
- This will also provide additional opportunities for teachers to ask questions, make suggestions, and brainstorm solutions to anything pertaining to the daily occurrences in the school or within their individual classrooms.

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

There was no clear teacher evaluation plan noted during the previous site visit, although Damar Charter Academy leadership was actively engaged in preparing for the implementation of the Indiana RISE teacher evaluation program.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

A system for teacher evaluation is currently being developed for the 2013-14 school year that is consistent with the underlying concepts that RISE puts forth with teachers being evaluated on multiple levels to determine effectiveness in the classrooms setting, but will be customized to the unique student population and challenges that Damar Charter Academy presents.

The two primary components of Professional Practice (Planning, Instruction, Leadership, and Core Professionalism) and Student Learning will be the primary components; however, student social and behavioral growth will be heavily incorporated into the student learning objectives along with appropriate academic goals. Evaluation rubric criteria will be based on best practices

outlined in writings of Danielson and Marzano and customized to the specific needs of Damar Charter Academy.

- Every teacher will receive at minimum two extended observations with appropriate written and oral feedback annually from the evaluator (principal). One of these will consist of an announced observation, the other an unannounced.
- Every teacher will receive at minimum three short observations per year. These may be performed by the principal or an administrative designee for additional viewpoints. A follow-up meeting may be held if there are areas of concern, but brief written comments will be provided to the teacher following the short observations. Struggling teachers may be placed on a professional development plan.
- The observations will be for information collection and providing feedback to teachers. A summative rating will be provided at the end of the year after all information is collected and analyzed. Teachers will be rated and scored using the Teacher Effectiveness Rubric (once again may be tweaked to the specific needs of Damar Charter Academy).
- The second component of the evaluation system (Student Learning) will focus more heavily on student growth toward Student Learning Objectives than on Student Achievement data. This is necessary due to the 98% special education population that Damar Charter Academy serves with only around 5% of the entire student population taking the standardized grade level ISTEP/ECA testing. Due to Damar Charter Academy's unique cultural makeup, using the Indiana Growth Model as an indicator is not a feasible option since there are no other schools on a level playing field comparatively. Likewise, it is not reasonable to factor in the school-wide A-F accountability model into teacher evaluations until an alternative measure for accountability is approved for the school. Student Learning Objectives will have dual components of both documented academic progress toward goals and behavioral progress toward goals.
- The final weighting for the teacher evaluation scores will be derived from a modified version of Group 3 in the RISE evaluation process. For the present time it will be based on 75% TER (Teacher Evaluation Rubric) and 25% SLO (Student Learning Objectives). In the future, if the alternative evaluation proposal for Damar Charter Academy is adopted, SLO will be adjusted to 20% and SWL (School-wide Learning Measures) will be adjusted to the remaining 5% per the standard Group 3 RISE components. Final weighted scores will be determined on a scale of 1-4, with ratings consistent with RISE (Ineffective, Improvement Necessary, Effective, and Highly Effective). Final ratings will be discussed with all teachers, and copies of the final summative evaluations as well as

final ratings will be provided to Human Resources after the conclusion of each school year for raise recommendations.

Indicator 4.7 (page 17/18):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

Processes that ensure commonalities of student behavior plans need to be developed and implemented.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

As previously stated, DCA will work to resolve any inconsistencies with regard to classroom and behavior management by implementing the following action plan:

- **Retrain** all DCA faculty and staff on the Damar Charter Academy Behavior Management Guide (page 33-34 of the DCA Parent & Student Handbook) and positive behavior support strategies (including our school-wide “clip chart” system)
- **Provide** feedback regarding behavior modification practices during faculty and staff evaluations
- **Increase** scope and frequency of staff training pertaining to behavior modification practices.
- **Ensure** classroom policies/rules are clearly displayed and communicated to students and staff and are based on positive behavior support strategies.
- **Analyze** each student’s behavioral data quarterly to report progress on current IEP goals and adjust behavioral intervention plans as needed.

Indicator 4.7 (page 18/19):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

Clarify the role of Director of Special Education and provide professional development and mentoring for the school Principal.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

- With DCA functioning without a principal for an extended period of time, the clarification of roles between the Principal and Special Education Director will be reinforced/clarified to teaching and assistant staff, and should correct itself. Both roles are

clearly defined in the formalized and signed job description paperwork on file in human resources for both positions.

- Based on recommendations from the review, DCA administration and the Board will consider whether it is more appropriate to have the Director of Special Education report to the Superintendent instead of the Principal. It was discussed that in some school systems the responsibilities of the Principal and the Director of Special Education may, at times, run counter to one another.
- Based on recommendations from the Superintendent, the Principal will obtain a mentor to establish regular conversations and meetings, and look to for guidance and knowledge from a more experienced school administrator.

Indicator 4.8 (page 20):

Observation from 2nd Year Site Visit report:

Damar Charter Academy should support parent efforts to establish and active Parent-Teacher Association.

Response from Damar Charter Academy:

Damar Charter Academy is currently working to create an active Parent Teacher Organization for the upcoming 2013-14 school year. Damar Charter Academy's Principal has joined the "PTO Today" website for additional information and ideas, and a voluntary committee of DCA teachers will be established at the beginning of the school year to coordinate meeting times and get the information out to all parents to promote maximum involvement.